

Struggle in Lithuania

Q. Mr. President — this question is directed to President Bush, but President Gorbachev, feel free to join in, of course. Mr. President, about six weeks ago you suggested that your patience was nearing an end in regards to the Lithuanian situation. I was wondering if that's still the case? If not, why has it changed and, specifically, have you received any assurances that the embargo will be lifted?

BUSH. No, there have been no such assurances. I'm not sure anything has changed. I don't recall placing it that my patience is nearing an end. I'm, and I have tried to make clear to everybody that we have not recognized the incorporation of these Baltic states into the Soviet Union and, therefore, we have a difference with the Soviet Union. They consider this an internal matter. And we say that having not recognized the inclusion, why, we have a different problem.

But we had some good discussions of this. I have been encouraged to see discussions going on over there between various leaders. And let's hope the matter can be resolved, because I haven't, I haven't lessened my view as to people's aspirations for self-determination. And I feel strongly about that. That's a hallmark of American belief and policy, and I haven't changed one bit on that.

But I would turn it over to President Gorbachev, who has a different view on it.

GORBACHEV. . . . It seems to me that our position is constructive and convincing. Our Constitution has recorded the right for each people to make a choice for sole determination, up to and including secession.

We did not have laws or legislation that would regulate. We did not have a mechanism that would regulate the implementation of that right. Now we have it recorded in the law.

So we are reforming our federation. We are expanding the republics' sovereign rights. And we hope that a full federation is something that we are in vital need of to resolve all the problems that have been accumulated.

This is our conviction. This is the way we're acting. And shortly, in the next few days, there's to be a federation council meeting convened to consider specific steps, dates and ways of resolving this particular problem in specific concrete terms.

Perhaps this particular process will develop in a way that would recognized imply the presence of different levels of federative ties, just like various ties or links between the republics.

If, nevertheless, in the framework of this process, some republic or other is going to raise this question — and I'm sure they will — they must be addressed and dealt with in the framework of the constitutional process.

We want to see this happen precisely on the basis of the Constitution. Any other different approach leads only to an impasse.

And the experience that we have by now not only with respect to Lithuania, but also with respect to other republics in terms of dealing with ethnic problems where some people are trying to resolve the problem by different methods without due regard for the Constitution, leads to exacerbation, aggravation and confrontation. And this is not beneficial either for people, for their families or for the economy or for the overall atmosphere in our country.

The President of the Soviet Union, just like the President of the United States of America, and I happen to know the American Constitution, have as one of their main responsibilities to defend and protect the constitutional system. I swore an oath of allegiance to the Constitution. And for that reason, we are prepared and willing to address any issue, including those that have been raised by the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian S.S.R. in the framework of the constitutional process.

This implies a referendum, incidentally... And let the people decide. After they make a choice, I'm sure no fewer than five or seven years would be required for us to sort things out.

There will be these divorce proceedings on the way, for there are 800,000 non-Lithuanians who live over there. Defense, missiles, navy — they're all there. Today, Lithuania's territory includes five areas that used to belong to Byelorussia. Stalin ceded Klaipeda, which the Soviet Union on the basis of the results of World War II, received, just as it did Kaliningrad and eastern Prussia. It received Lithuanian territories.

So they raised this question to return to Russia these lands.

And we'll do our best in order to resolve on the basis of constitutional approaches this particular issue.

But any other way would be unacceptable. I keep referring to — well, I'm not asking the President to come over to us and bring order into our house — but I keep saying that President Bush would have resolved an issue like this within 24 hours and he would have restored the validity of his Constitution within 24 hours in any state. But we are going to resolve it. We are going to do it ourselves.

With full responsibility, I wish to declare here and now for all of you to know that we are anxious to see this issue resolved in such a way as everybody's interests would be taken into account and within the Constitution's framework.

Lithuanian Independence

This question is directed at President Bush, but President Gorbachev, feel free to join in, of course. Mr. President, about six weeks ago, you suggested that your patience was nearing an end in regards to the Lithuanian situation. I was wondering if that's still the case. If not, what has changed? And specifically, have you received any assurances that the embargo will be lifted?

BUSH: No, there have been no such assurances. I'm not sure anything has changed. I don't recall placing it that "my patience is nearing an end." But I have tried to make clear to everybody that we have not recognized the incorporation of these Baltic states into the Soviet Union, and, therefore, we have a difference with the Soviet Union. They consider this an internal matter, and we say that, having not recognized the inclusion, why we have a different problem.

But we had some good discussions of this. I have been encouraged to see discussions going on over there between various leaders, and let's hope the matter can be resolved because I haven't lessened my view as to peoples' aspirations for self-determination. And I feel strongly about that. That's a hallmark of American belief and policy. And I haven't changed one bit on that. But I would turn it over to President Gorbachev, who has a different view on it.

GORBACHEV: I really don't even know what I can tell you now, because two days ago in a meeting with representatives of congressional leadership, I explained our position in great detail. It seems to me that our position is constructive and convincing. Our Constitution has recorded the right for each people to make a choice for sole determination up to and including secession. We did not have laws or legislation that would regulate—we did not have a mechanism that would regulate—the implementation of that right. Now we have it recorded in the law. So, we are reforming our federation. We are expanding the republics' sovereign rights. And we hope that a full federation is something that we are in vital need of to resolve all the problems that have been accumulated. This is our conviction. This is the way we're acting.

And shortly, in the next few days, there is to be a federation council meeting convened to consider specific steps, dates and ways of resolving this particular problem in specific, concrete terms. Perhaps this particular process will develop in a way that would imply the presence of different levels of federative ties, just like various ties or links between the republics. This will be a new process, new forms of links, of the kind that would be in consonant with the purposes of our *perestroika*, with the goals of reforming our federation. This is one direction.

If, nevertheless, in the framework of this process, some republic or other is going to raise this question—and I am sure they will—they must be addressed and dealt with in the framework of the constitutional process. We want to see this happen pre-

cisely on the basis of the Constitution. Any other different approach leads only to an impasse. And the experience that we have by now, not only with respect to Lithuania but also with respect to other republics, in terms of dealing with ethnic problems where some people are trying to resolve the problem by different methods, without due regard for the Constitution, leads to exacerbation, aggravation and confrontation. And this is not beneficial either for people, for their families, or for the economy, or for the overall atmosphere in our country.

The president of the Soviet Union, just like the president of the United States of America—and I happen to know the American Constitution—have as one of their main responsibilities to defend and protect the constitutional system. I swore an oath of allegiance to the Constitution, and for that reason we are prepared and willing to address any issue, including those that have been raised by the Supreme Soviet of the Lithuanian SSR in the framework of the constitutional process.

This implies a referendum, incidentally. As to the referendum, those who have engineered this kind of solution, if I may say so, regarding the statehood of Lithuania, will also address our own option, and let the people decide. After they make a choice, I'm sure no fewer than five or seven years would be required for us to sort things out. There will be this divorce proceedings underway, for there are 800,000 known Lithuanians who live over there. Defense, missiles, navy, they're all there. Today, Lithuania's territory includes five areas that used to belong to Byelorussia. Stalin ceded Klaipeda, which the Soviet Union, on the basis of the result of World War II, received just as it did Kaliningrad and Eastern Prussia. It received Lithuanian territory. So they raised this question to return to Russia these lands.

Recently, the president of France—I held a press conference with President [Francois] Mitterrand of France just as I'm doing now with President Bush here. And I said, "Listen, in order to make a decision how to act with respect to overseas territories such as Caledonia, France has projected a period of 10 years. How is it possible for us to resolve issues such as this overnight, when people met pending the opening of the Third Congress of People's Deputies and put the question to the vote?" Is that a responsible policy, really, I ask myself?

I really think that we are acting in accordance with a mandate from the Third Congress of People's Deputies, and we have a vast reserve of goodwill and constructive spirit. And we do our best in order to resolve on the basis of constitutional approaches this particular issue. But any other way would be unacceptable.

I keep referring to—well, I'm not asking the president to come over to us and bring order into our house, but I keep saying that President Bush would have resolved an issue like this within 24 hours, and he would have restored the validity of his Constitution within 24 hours on any state.

But we are going to resolve it. We are going to do it ourselves. With full responsibility I wish to declare here now, for all of you to know, that we are anxious to see this issue resolved in such a way as everybody's interests would be taken into account, and within the Constitution's framework.